

Curecanti: Great Scenery, Outstanding Resources and Good Neighbors



Working as a community to conserve
the resources of the Curecanti area

This booklet offers ideas about how agencies and landowners can work together to maintain the outstanding qualities that we commonly value - the natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources that make the area within and surrounding Curecanti such a great place to live, work and play.

Introduction

If you own property in the Curecanti Area, you probably chose this area for its scenic beauty, wildlife, sense of history, and recreational potential. Or, perhaps you grew up in this area, it is a part of your heritage, and you value it for many of the same reasons.

Nestled in Gunnison and Montrose Counties, the reservoirs and canyons of Curecanti National Recreation Area offer a premier wild setting that contains a variety of magnificent resources – natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational. Thousands of visitors – those who aren't as fortunate as we are to call this place home - come here to enjoy these resources, and this tourism contributes greatly to our local economy.

The Curecanti area is recognized nationally and locally for its abundant wildlife, archeological and historic values, recreational potential and high scenic qualities. This has been acknowledged in numerous ways, including:

- Designating the National Park Service to manage Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA), in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation;
- Establishing special management areas, such as the Bureau of Land Management's Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), and Colorado Division of Wildlife's State Wildlife Areas; and
- Designating the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway by the State of Colorado, where segments of Highway 92 and Highway 50 play an important role.

The National Park Service has been a part of the Gunnison and Montrose communities for over 30 years now, as caretaker and steward of Curecanti NRA. The Park Service shares in the heritage of the Gunnison and Montrose communities, and shares in the attendant responsibilities associated with being a member of a community. With you we share in a common appreciation for the various qualities of the land and the need for a healthy economy. We are looking toward the future of our community.



Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton has set the standard in the Department of the Interior by implementing a land management strategy that incorporates her vision of the four "Cs" – using Communication, Consultation and Cooperation, all in the service of Conservation. We recognize that the magnificent resources and the beauty of the land transcend what the National Park Service traditionally thinks of as the NRA boundary. Together, as a community, we must explore opportunities to conserve and enhance these resources for ourselves, for our future generations that will come to regard this area as part of their heritage, and for the many visitors that come to enjoy this part of Colorado.

For additional ideas on how communities and agencies can work together, visit the "Community Stewardship Exchange" website referenced on the back cover.

What Can a Landowner Do to Move Toward Our Common Goals?

Here are some initial ideas—

Sustaining our Scenic Resource

SITING AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS



A carefully located building site can provide lasting and significant value to properties that become developed. The landowner should consider a variety of factors, including prevailing winds, slope, suitable locations for wells and septic systems, vegetation removal, access, visual impact of the building, and the angle of the sun throughout the year.

The visual impact of houses and other structures on the natural scene can be minimized by using a number of techniques. The building might be located so that the surrounding terrain hides the building from nearby roads, trails and recreation sites. Trees and shrubbery can be used to shield the site. Buildings can be set back from the top of the slope or below the crest of a ridge to lessen visual impact. Buildings with low profiles and architectural designs that fit into the surrounding natural landscape result in less visual impact. Roads and driveways designed to minimize cut and fill will cause less visual impact while reducing erosion and drainage problems. The visual impact of power lines and other utilities can be reduced through careful siting or by placing them underground. Antennas can be made less conspicuous by limiting their height and keeping them in unobtrusive locations.

For additional design and construction ideas, visit the "Sustainable Design" and "CSU Cooperative Extension" websites; and for general information on living in rural areas, visit the "Code of the West" website, all referenced on the back cover.

BUILDING MATERIALS OF LOW VISUAL IMPACT

Proper selection of materials used for siding and roofing can help your home complement the natural areas around it. These materials include sidings with muted natural shades or "earth tones" on rough-textured material; and dark (gray, green or brown) roofs of non-reflective metal, imitation shake, or earth-tone composition shingles. Certain building materials may also be preferable because they help reduce fire hazard, as described later under "Ensuring Wildfire Safety."

EXTERIOR LIGHTING

The Curecanti area offers excellent nighttime "skylscapes"-- opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy stargazing unparalleled in most other areas of the country. Use of shielded lighting, and low light fixtures that direct the light downward, can reduce glare and sky glow. Try to avoid the use of mercury vapor lights, which produce glare and detract from views of the night sky. Many local governments prohibit the use of mercury vapor luminaries in order to protect views of the night sky. Energy costs can be lowered by carefully considering where and how much light is needed. Also consider the use of lights activated by motion detectors, which further reduce energy costs while increasing security.



For ideas and resources to help keep our skies dark, visit the "International Dark Sky Association" website referenced on the back cover.

Preserving and Improving Natural Habitat

Habitats are closely interrelated systems that include natural or native vegetation, rivers and streams, food and protection for a variety of animals. There are several ways that an owner can improve the habitat on his or her land, thus benefiting area wildlife.

One of the easiest methods of preserving and improving the habitat is the use of plants. When considering new construction, minimize the amount of area that will be cleared of vegetation. Keeping as much original vegetation as is reasonable will not only help maintain the natural habitat, but also helps in reducing excessive runoff of storm water, thereby decreasing erosion.

Once construction is finished, consider landscaping with native plants. Natives will generally have a better chance of survival with less care than introduced species, and should be less expensive to maintain. Native plants also provide shelter and food for native birds and other animals.

Avoid the use of exotic, invasive, or non-native plants, because they can spread, and may compete with and crowd out native species. If you suspect that exotic species exist on your property, and would like information on how to control or eradicate them, you may contact officials in Gunnison County or at the National Recreation Area for technical assistance.



Aquatic habitat can be protected and improved with vegetation, too. Trees can provide shade and shelter for fish that cannot tolerate high water temperature. Plantings along a stream bank help anchor the soil and reduce erosion.

Trees and shrubs can be used to lessen the visual impact of a new or existing structure without sacrificing the view from porches or balconies. A visual barrier created by plants need not be a solid wall. Rather, judiciously placed plants will help blend the building into the natural landscape and still offer scenic vistas, while providing nesting places for birds and other animals. Appropriate landscaping can also reduce wildfire hazard, as described later under Ensuring Wildfire Safety.

For additional information on how to conserve wildlife and natural habitat, visit the "Grants at a Glance" U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website referenced on the back cover. For information regarding exotic, or non-native plants, visit the "Colorado Noxious Weeds" and "Exotic, Invasive, or Non-Native Species" websites referenced on the back cover.

Protecting Water Quality

Maintaining a pure water supply is critical for all of us. A properly placed and maintained well protects the water quality on the property where the well is located and also on the surrounding properties. Several wells are often drilled into the same water source, or aquifer, which make it imperative that the shared water stays clean.

A site where the land falls away from the wellhead in all directions is the best location. At such a site, the chance for impurities to drain into the well is minimized. A well on level ground is acceptable, but is not considered to be as safe as a well with positive drainage away from the wellhead. A site where surface water moves to or into the wellhead should be avoided in all cases.



The well must also be separated from potential sources of contaminants. Parking areas, septic tanks and drain fields, manure storage, and animal feed storage areas are sources of possible contamination. The well should be located away from areas such as these, and whenever possible, uphill from them.

Protecting water quality also can be applied to surface water on the property. Like the water in an aquifer, the water in streams, lakes, wetlands, and ponds is a resource that is shared with your neighbors, not to mention wildlife. The quality of surface water also has a significant impact on the value of a property. Many of the techniques that help protect wellheads can also be applied to surface water. In this case, however, the placement of new structures or other improvements must be done with regards to potential impact on the stream or other waterway.

Natural or created wetlands can provide protection from flooding and help filter some contaminants out of water before it enters the subterranean aquifer. Allowing clean water to drain into wetlands can help protect or even improve the quality of the aquifer. Areas that are moist or wet throughout most of the year are also less likely to burn, thus providing protection from wildfire.

Techniques for maintaining quality water sources are available on the "Ground and Drinking Water" website referenced on the back cover.

Protecting Yourself and Property from Wildfire

Fire is a naturally occurring event in forested and other rural areas. However, there are a number of proven strategies to reduce the likelihood of damage to your home and other structures if your property is in an area potentially threatened by wildland fires. The added "insurance" of these methods can contribute to your peace of mind.

Ideas for selecting building sites and materials:

- Build away from the crest of a hill – Fire can move rapidly up a slope. The steeper the slope, the faster the fire can travel.
- Use composite, slate, tile, or Class-A treated materials on the roof instead of untreated cedar or shake shingles.
- Cover the chimney openings with ¼-inch wire mesh to prevent embers from escaping (or entering!).

Landscaping to Reduce Fire Hazard:



- Reduce the amount of fuel materials (dead leaves, branches, etc.) near the house.
- Maintain a clearing or "defensible space" of at least 30 feet around the house. The defensible space does not need to be only rock or concrete, but should be free of trees and other volatile materials. This area can also provide easier access for emergency vehicles.
- Create a landscape design that provides a transition into the natural setting. The design may include the defensible space, a zone of irrigated low-growing plants, shrubs, and widely spaced trees, and then into the natural environment surrounding the home site.

For additional details on ways to reduce the threat of fire to your property, visit the "Firewise" website referenced on the back cover.

What Assistance is Available to Landowners?

Landowners who are interested in conserving the natural and scenic character of their land have several options for assistance, including working in partnership with counties and land-management agencies. Although a few are listed here, we recommend visiting the *"Curecanti Toolbox of Incentives for Resource Conservation"* website referenced on the back cover, or request a copy from the Superintendent at the address on the back cover. These incentive opportunities include:

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The National Park Service is currently able to provide some technical assistance, and expects to be able to provide a wider range of assistance in the future, including:

- Advice regarding resource management for topics such as:
 - ... Conservation of natural and cultural resources, including archeological sites and historic structures;
 - ... Conservation of various plant and animal species, especially those that may be rare or threatened;
 - ... Reduction or elimination of exotic species that are not native to the area;
- Advice on siting and design considerations for environmentally sensitive development;
- Working with the county planning process early on to identify ways to permit development yet minimize impacts;
- Determination of the location of regulated wetlands and need for permits;
- Directing landowners to other organizations with expertise in certain fields, such as land trusts;
- Directing landowners to funding sources for worthwhile conservation projects;
- Education programs that inform park neighbors about the Curecanti environment and stimulate thinking toward sustainable development.



FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Landowners may be able to obtain funding to assist with conservation oriented projects, especially if there is a local "match" available to assist in the project. Development and submission of grant applications is more successful when done in partnership and cooperation with an agency, the county government, or a local or national organization. Examples of funding sources include:

- Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund (GOCO)—uses a portion of state lottery proceeds for projects that preserve, protect, and enhance Colorado's wildlife, parks, rivers, trails, and open spaces.
- National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program—provides a maximum 50% cost share grant for projects that benefit natural, cultural, scenic or recreational resources.
- Landowner Incentives Program, Private Stewardship Grants Program and the Colorado Species Conservation Partnership—the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Colorado Division of Wildlife have grants available for landowners and organizations involved in voluntary conservation projects that benefit wildlife.

For a more thorough listing of grant opportunities, visit the "Federal Grants" and "Grants at a Glance" websites referenced on the back cover.

ALTERNATIVES FOR LAND OWNERSHIP

As an alternative to owning their properties outright, many landowners find it to their advantage for a land trust or a land-management agency (such as the National Park Service) to acquire an interest in their property, on a willing-seller basis, for conservation purposes. Three common methods include:

- **Conservation, nondevelopment, and/or scenic easements:** Easements allow specified activities in designated areas, with certain deed restrictions, usually pertaining to development, to ensure that private uses will remain compatible with the conservation of resource values, and/or public use of the land. The landowner is reimbursed for the fair market value of the interest acquired. Although the landowner continues to pay property tax, it may be at a reduced amount, and there may be significant income tax and estate tax benefits.
- **Purchase and retained use and occupancy:** In this situation, the agency buys the property at fair market value, but the landowner can continue to live on the land for an agreed-upon time period, or for the remainder of his or her life. Although the property is taken off the tax rolls, the federal government may provide payment in lieu of taxes to the county. Two common forms of retained use are 25-years and life estates.
- **Fee simple acquisition:** In this situation, the agency acquires all rights or interests in the property. Four common methods of acquisition are:
 - Direct purchase at fair market value with appropriated funds.
 - Third party purchase through entities such as land trusts and conservation organizations.
 - Exchange for other government land of equal value.
 - Donation, in which case there would be tax advantages to the landowner.

An increasingly popular alternative is the conservation easement. It provides permanence to land protection, allows owners to retain title to their lands, and provides immediate monetary compensation, as well as long-term tax advantages. It is a property deed that specifies terms and conditions for managing the land, and specifies what, if any, future development can occur. Some landowners wish to leave a legacy to their family or future generations—and establishing a conservation easement is one process to achieve this. By selling a conservation easement to a land trust or government entity, the landowner receives monetary compensation based on appraised value. Occasionally, a landowner will donate all or some of the easement, thus receiving state and federal tax benefits. Reduced estate taxes may be another benefit. In addition, a conservation easement will sometimes lower property taxes which the landowner must pay, due to reduced value of the property, based upon the terms of the easement. Terms and conditions of the conservation easement are tailored to individual situations. The entity holding the easement is responsible for future monitoring of the site to ensure the conditions of the easement are met.

For additional information on conservation easements, visit the websites of the following organizations, which are referenced on the back cover; or call the American Farmland Trust at (800) 370-4879, the Black Canyon Regional Land Trust at (970) 252-1481, the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust at (303) 431-6422, the Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy at (970) 641-4386, or the Nature Conservancy at (970) 252-0034.

Looking for Additional Information?

A variety of information is available over the Internet on the World Wide Web (www). We recommend visiting some of these websites for additional information. If you do not have your own Internet access, visit a library that offers computers with web access and ask a librarian for assistance.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

American Farmland Trust — www.farmland.org
Black Canyon Regional Land Trust (website under construction)
Code of the West — www.co.gunnison.co.us
Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust — www.ccalt.org
Colorado Noxious Weeds — www.ext.colostate.edu/ptlk/2103.html
Community Stewardship Exchange — www.sonoran.org
CSU Cooperative Extension (landscaping, gardening & other advise) — www.ext.colostate.edu
Curecanti Toolbox of Incentives for Resource Conservation — www.nps.gov/cure/webvc/resources.htm
Exotic, Invasive, or Non-Native Species — www.invasivespecies.gov
Federal Grants (links to a variety of funding sources) — www.grants.gov
Firewise (making sensible choices in the wildland/urban interface) — www.firewise.org
Grants at a Glance (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) — <http://grants.fws.gov>
Ground and Drinking Water (EPA) — www.epa.gov/safewater
Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy — www.gunnisonlegacy.org
International Dark-Sky Association — www.darksky.org
Land Trust Alliance — www.lta.org
The Nature Conservancy — www.nature.org
Sustainable Design: (U.S. Green Building Council) — www.usgbc.org

NOTE: Please be aware that some of the incentives in the "Toolbox of Incentives for Resource Conservation," and the offers of "Technical Assistance" in this booklet are ideas that need additional consideration, and in some cases will require Congressional or legislative authorization and appropriations of funds. Also, we are not in a position to advise people on matters pertaining to legal issues, tax issues, estate planning, etc. For these matters readers should consider seeking professional advice.

We hope the ideas presented in this booklet will be of value to you,
and invite your suggestions and comments for future revisions.

Thank you.

This booklet has been produced cooperatively by Gunnison County and the National Park Service.



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR TO PROVIDE COMMENT,
CONTACT EITHER:

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Superintendent
Curecanti National Recreation Area
102 Elk Creek
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-2337

For information on local land use policies and development procedures
within Gunnison County, visit www.co.gunnison.co.us or call the
Gunnison County Planning Department at (970) 641-0360.

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